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DOCID: 1 - 22865/63 - CIA - DIA

CHINESE COMMUNIST GROUND THREAT AGAINST INDIA FROM TIBET AND SINKIANG

USIB MEMORANDUM

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

17 April 1963

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: AUG 2000

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1-22865/63

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

17 April 1963

SUBJECT: CHINESE COMMUNIST GROUND THREAT AGAINST INDIA FROM TIBET AND SINKIANG

THE PROBLEM

The object of this study is to examine the offensive capabilities during 1963 of Communist China's ground forces against India and the Himalayan border states. This study does not consider attacks that might be launched by Chinese forces through Burma. It does not estimate Chinese Communist intentions.

CONCLUSIONS

A. Chinese Communist forces presently in the Sino-Indian border area consist of 4 divisions, 11 separate combat regiments, 5 border defense regiments, and administrative and support troops totaling about 120,000 men. A major offensive effort against India, as specified in B, would require the redeployment of additional divisions from elsewhere, which the Chinese could do without seriously jeopardizing their overall military posture. (Para. 2)

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification

~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

B. Supplies for Chinese Communist military forces in southwest Sinkiang and Tibet are transported by road from rail-served base depots at Chengtu in Szechwan; Lanchou, and Hsiatung in Kansu; and in the vicinity of Urumchi in Sinkiang. From these railheads supplies are moved into the frontier area by motor transport over long and difficult routes, ranging from 500 to 1,800 miles, thus limiting the quantities of supplies which can be delivered. (Paras. 3-4)

C. We estimate that the Chinese could deliver an average of 1,600 tons per day to Tibet and southwest Sinkiang; this operation would require about 40,000 trucks. This rate of delivery, assuming the establishment of substantial reserves in the forward areas, would be sufficient on a continuing basis to satisfy the daily resupply requirements of about 225,000 combat and service troops. Of these a maximum of approximately 175,000 could be supported logistically in simultaneous attacks. We believe, however, that in the feasible avenues of attack operational and logistic limitations are such that the Chinese would employ a force on the order of 123,000 men. The tonnage of 1,600 tons per day also could support air operations consuming approximately 450 tons daily. This maximum support effort would tax China's motor transport capabilities and would result in a heavy drain on POL supplies. (Paras. 5-6)

D. We believe that the main threat to India and the Himalayan border states would be limited to simultaneous attacks in Ladakh, through

the border passes between Ladakh and Nepal, into Nepal, into northern Assam across Bhutan, and into the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA). We estimate the forces that could be employed and supported in these attacks would consist of 5 light infantry divisions, 15 independent infantry regiments, and 2 airborne battalions totaling 123,000 troops. (Para. 14)

E. We estimate that the Chinese, should they launch the attacks described above, would have the following military objectives:

a. In Ladakh, to extend Chinese control to include the capture of the important center of Leh.

b. In the border area between Ladakh and Nepal, to seize the Chinese territorial claim north of Joshimath.

c. In Nepal, to seize the major valley approaches and the city of Katmandu.

d. In the east, to occupy NEFA and that part of Assam north of the Brahmaputra River by establishing a strong lodgement in the Gauhati area. (Paras. 14-32)

F. The next favorable periods for offensive operations begin in May for the avenues of approach on the frontier west of Katmandu and in September for the avenues east of Katmandu. (Paras. 7-9)

DISCUSSION

I. GENERAL

1. With 2.6 million men the Chinese Communist Army is the largest in the world, and has been able, under certain circumstances, to field an effective fighting force. There are several factors, however, which we believe are causing the Chinese Communist leaders concern as to the ability of their armed forces adequately to support China's foreign policies. Now virtually without supply and support from the USSR, obsolescence and wear and tear have caused a decline in the effectiveness of the armed forces' equipment and weapons. We believe that China's industry cannot produce enough of the heavier and more complex equipment -- notably aircraft and naval ships and possibly armored fighting vehicles -- to maintain present equipment levels. Peiping also probably sees several situations, in addition to the border dispute with India, which may require the commitment of military forces: the situations in Laos, Vietnam, the Taiwan Strait, and North Korea. Even the Sino-Soviet dispute will probably place additional limitations on Chinese military capabilities through further restriction of supply of essential materials and the possible need to watch over the long Sino-Soviet border more closely than to date.

2. China's troop dispositions are directed toward coastal and border defense. A secondary mission for all units is internal security, and, in

some areas such as Tibet, this function has been the main occupation of the units stationed there. The Chinese now have a force of 120,000 men in Tibet and southwest Sinkiang including 4 infantry divisions, 11 separate combat regiments, and 5 border defense regiments. A major offensive effort against India would require the employment of additonal divisions. These could, under present circumstances, be drawn from the estimated 11 armies[1/] in reserve in north, east, and central China to reinforce the frontier area without seriously jeopardizing China's overall defense posture.

II. LOGISTICS

3. Supplies for Chinese Communist military forces in southwest Sinkiang and Tibet are transported by road over distances ranging from 500 to 1,800 miles from rail-served base depots at Chengtu in Szechwan; Lanchou, and Hsiatung in Kansu; and in the vicinity of Urumchi in Sinkiang. The facilities at these railheads are capable of handling the supply requirement of the maximum forces deployable in the Sino-Indian border area.

4. From the Chengtu transshipment point supplies are delivered to the Changtu-Fangta area via the Szechwan-Tibet highway for distribution to forces located in eastern Tibet and along the frontier from Lima west

1/ The Chinese Communist "army" resembles in size a US corps, its basic tactical components consisting of three infantry divisions.

to Milin. From Lanchou and Hsiatung supplies are moved over the Tsinghai-Tibet road to the Nagchhu Dzong and Yangpaching distribution depots serving west, central, and southern Tibet. From the Urumchi railhead goods move by road to a supply base at Kashgar and from there to units in the Yarkand and Ladakh areas. The Kashgar base probably also gives some support to troops located in extreme western Tibet.

5. Under optimum conditions a total of 2,000 tons per day could be delivered to the military subdistricts in southwest Sinkiang and Tibet. This tonnage, however, is unlikely to be achieved during all periods of the year because of climatic factors. Therefore, it is estimated that the maximum sustained tonnage deliverable to supply distribution points in Tibet and southwest Sinkiang is an average of 1,600 tons per day. The attacks described in this study would tax China's motor transport capabilities and would result in a heavy, although not insupportable, drain on POL supplies. The delivery of tonnages to support these operations over the period of a year would require about 40,000 trucks and approximately 600,000 tons of motor gasoline, about 40 percent of the total motor gasoline available in all of China in 1962. An effort of this size probably could not be supported if China were involved in significant military activity elsewhere.

6. This rate of delivery, assuming the establishment of substantial combat reserves in the forward areas, is sufficient on a continuing basis

to satisfy the daily resupply requirements of about 225,000 combat and service troops. Of these a maximum of approximately 175,000 men could be supported logistically in simultaneous attacks. However, we believe that the operational and logistic limitations encountered in feasible avenues of attack are such that the Chinese would employ a force on the order of 123,000 men. In addition to meeting the above ground force needs, the tonnage of 1,600 tons per day also could support air operations consuming approximately 450 tons daily.

III. CLIMATE

7. Although severe winter weather is an important factor in the conduct of military operations along the Sino-Indian border, low temperature and snow in themselves are unlikely completely to prohibit activity. More serious problems arise from melting snow and ice and heavier precipitation in spring and summer. Mid-October to mid-December is the most favorable period for operations all along the border and road conditions will be at their maximum capacity during this time of the year, although in the western segment of the frontier as far east as Nepal, favorable conditions may begin as early as May, but usually later.

8. In the western half of the frontier, which encompasses Ladakh, the high central Tibetan plateau and most of Nepal, April and May is a

difficult season because melting snows make streams unfordable and flat-floored valleys are often flooded. The summer in this sector in generally favorable for operations except in Nepal, where heavy rains from the southwest monsoon cause landslides and swollen streams particularly along the access routes from India. From December to March temperatures are severely low and winds, occasionally reaching gale force, not only make the cold difficult to endure but also fill the air with fine penetrating dust. Snowstorms and blizzards are frequent, especially in the mountains.

9. In the eastern segment of the frontier, extending from eastern Nepal through Sikkim, Bhutan, and the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) and including Lhasa to the north and a narrow belt of the Brahmaputra River Valley to the south, road conditions during the spring months of April and May will be only fair. Flooding, unfordable streams, and landslides may obstruct routes for short periods. June to September are the worst months for operations in the eastern segment of the frontier; roads in the Brahmaputra River Valley and in the Lhasa area may be flooded. In NEFA, particularly in the eastern part, road capacities are reduced to a minimum during the southwest monsoon season.

IV. MILITARY OPERATIONS

10. In the Himalayan region the physiographic effects on military operations are enormous, and the harsh environment requires modifications

in organization, equipment, and tactics. The use of trucks, armor, and artillery is limited by the inadequate road network. Maintenance problems are also increased. Troops tire easily, combat loads must be reduced, and daily march times and distances must be shortened. Animal transport and porters are relied upon heavily.

11. Tactical movements require more detailed preparations than those at lower altitudes. Reconnaissance and security on the march require special attention. Tactical operations will rarely take place at an echelon above that of the regiment. The regiment and the battalion are the units usually employed along a single axis against a single tactical objective. Operations are characterized by infiltration, ambushes, and envelopments.

12. We believe the standard organization of the Chinese Communist infantry division has been modified to conform to the decentralized operational requirements of mountain operations. During the recent fighting on the border the Chinese used 120-mm mortars, 76.2-mm mountain guns, and recoilless rifles. The largest artillery piece likely to be employed south of the Himalayas is the 122-mm howitzer. Although tanks have been reported in Ladakh and in the Chumbi Valley, there is no evidence that the Chinese have large numbers of tanks in Tibet. We believe that only in southern Sikkim could tanks be employed in other than an assault gun and artillery role. It would be extremely difficult for the Chinese to move more than a few tanks on to the Indian plain.

13. The Chinese have a limited capability to employ airborne forces. We estimate that not more than two battalions could be dropped in support of the actions described below at a given time. Airborne troops could be staged at airfields at Kashgar, Hotien (Khotan), Soche, Kaerhmu, Chengtu, and Kunming.

V. AVENUES OF ATTACK

14. We believe that, in the most feasible avenues of attack a maximum force of 123,000 men, consisting of 5 light infantry divisions, 15 infantry regiments, and 2 airborne battalions, could be employed. Difficulties of logistics and restrictions of terrain, we believe, would limit the Chinese to the following major military objectives:

a. In Ladakh, an extension of Chinese control to include the capture of the important communications center and airbase at Leh.

b. In the border area between Ladakh and Nepal, to seize the Chinese territorial claim north of Joshimath which would be a psychological threat to New Delhi.

c. In Nepal, to facilitate the eventual occupation of the country by seizure of the major valley approaches and the capture of the city of Katmandu in order to forestall Indian intervention.

d. In the East, the effective occupation of the NEFA and that part of Assam north of the Brahmaputra River.

Ladakh

15. In Ladakh the Chinese Communists completed a road from Sinkiang in 1957. From this road, they have constructed a number of feeder roads, including one in the west that roughly parallels the main road, which permit the movement of troops and supplies to outposts. Generally the valleys provide natural roadbeds that require little construction or maintenance to be made usable for motor transport. The approach routes from Ladakh converge on Leh across the Karakoram and Ladakh Ranges; through the Saser Pass (17,480 feet) to Panamik from the north and via Chushul and Shyok from the southeast. Of these, the latter, a motorable route, is by far the more favorable avenue of approach. From Leh the road twists across two great mountain ranges to Srinagar, the major Indian military base in Kashmir.

16. The road network leading from Sinkiang and western Tibet into Ladakh will support an estimated seven light infantry divisions. This capability exists for operations within northern and eastern Ladakh and north of the frontier; for operations further south, however, this support capability drops as motorable roads give way to pack trails.

17. The Chinese could launch the following attacks in the Ladakh area:

a. One infantry regiment could move from Daulat Beg Oldi through the Sasser Pass to Panamik (120 miles), but since the pass is closed from December to May, the resupply of this regiment during the winter months would have to be accomplished by airdrop or by road from Chushul.

b. Given sufficient engineer support for road improvement, 1 light infantry division could be supported from the Chushul area, with 2 regiments advancing to Leh (100 miles) and 1 regiment supporting the thrust from the north on Panamik by advancing up the Shyok River Valley to the area of Tirit (100 miles).

c. Because of logistic limitations and the need to improve road systems as they advance, Chinese military objectives would probably be limited to an extension of their control of the Ladakh area to include the capture of the key communications center of Leh.

The Border Passes Between Ladakh and Nepal

18. Along the border between the Chushul area in southern Ladakh and Nepal there are several passes through which Chinese forces could

attack. Of these, the best avenues of approach, although they are narrow defiles subject to blockage by snow during the winter months, are through Shipki Pass (15,400 feet), Mana Pass (17,890 feet), Niti Pass (16,600 feet), and Lipulek Pass (16,750 feet).

19. After May, two infantry regiments could be supported in and advance through Shipki Pass to the vicinity of Chini (45 miles). Not more than three regiments could be moved through Mana and Niti Passes to Joshimath (approximately 45 miles); and two regiments through Lipulek Pass to the general area of Dharchula (20 miles). Advances beyond Chini, Joshimath, and Dharchula could not be logistically supported until the Chinese had improved the existing trails to accommodate one-quarter-ton vehicles. Further, we believe that the Chinese would be unable to re-supply by air during the winter months, and the regiments would be forced to withdraw north of the passes.

Nepal

20. The Chinese have good lateral communications along the entire frontier on the Shigatse (Zhikatse)-Gartok road. They have built feeder roads toward the major passes and trails lead from these roads through all the passes, many of which are open for much of the winter.

21. If the Chinese could seize the Katmandu airfield, they could then airland up to 1 lightly-equipped infantry division within 5 to 7 days.

We estimate that by extensive utilization of pack animals and porters the Chinese could support attacks by one infantry regiment through each of the following passes: through Naralagna Pass to Bajang; through Kore Pass to Dana; through Kyirong Pass to Nawakot; through Kodari Pass to Dhulikhel; and through Rakha Pass to Dingla.

22. The tenure of even limited Chinese forces in northern Nepal would be largely dependent on stockpiling and their ability to sustain porterage operations through the northern passes in winter. We estimate that they could not attack India through Nepal.

The Sikkim Area

23. There are two converging avenues of approach from the Chumbi Valley through Sikkim to Siliguri. One, a motorable road, leads through Natu Pass (14,500 feet) via Gangtok; the other, an unimproved road, crosses the frontier through Jelep Pass joining the former road near Kalimpong.

24. We estimate that the Chinese could attack through the Natu and Jelep Passes with two light infantry divisions and advance to Gangtok (34 miles) without improving the roads. If the road capacities between the frontier and Gangtok were increased, which would require an estimated 6 to 10 weeks, a total of 3 light infantry divisions and 2 standard infantry divisions with armor could be supported in an advance to Siliguri

(100 miles from the frontier). The Chinese could make an enveloping movement around the established Indian defensive positions in Sikkim by making an initial attack in not more than regimental strength down the difficult Torsa River Valley which generally parallels the Bhutan-Sikkim border.

25. Logistic support of larger Chinese forces required to hold the exposed Siliguri position during the winter months would be extremely difficult. Unless stocks of supplies were captured or airfields secured to support airlift operations, a reduction in strength to not more than one division would be necessary and its withdrawal to the Darjeeling area would be required.

26. Western Bhutan. An undeveloped trail goes from Pari Dzong in Tibet through western Bhutan and joins the road connecting Paro Dzong to Hasimara. We estimate that the Chinese could advance to Paro Dzong with one division without improving the trail. If the trail were improved to permit the movement of vehicles, this division could be supported in an advance to Hasimara. Overland logistic support of this division in the Hasimara area during the winter would be possible provided stockpiling were carried out promptly.

27. Eastern Bhutan and Western NEFA. There are two converging routes which cross Bhutan and form an approach to Assam: one from Lhakhang Dzong to Gauhati via Lhuntsi Dzong and Dewangiri; the other from Bum La to Gauhati via Towang, Tashigang Dzong, and Dewangiri.

28. In an advance through Bhutan the Chinese initially could support 2 infantry regiments at Tashigang Dzong (50 miles), and 2 infantry regiments at Lhuntsi Dzong (30 miles). After road improvements, the Chinese could maintain 3 light infantry divisions within Bhutan, or could advance to Gauhati (145 miles) with at least 2 divisions.

29. ~~In~~ northwest NEFA there is a motorable road which connects Bum La with Tezpur and which passes through Towang and Bomdi La. We estimate that, if the Chinese were to attack from Bum La to Bomdi La (90 miles) they could support two light infantry divisions at Bomdi La and advance with one of these divisions to Tezpur.

30. Central and Eastern NEFA. There are two avenues of approach across the McMahon Line into NEFA: in central NEFA from the border village of Longju south through the Subansiri River Valley; and in eastern NEFA from Lima through the Luhit River Valley via Walong.

31. A penetration from Longju would be restricted to a distance over which porter supply lines could be operated. We estimate that, at a maximum, the Chinese could support two regiments via tracks in the Subansiri River Valley up to 30 or 40 miles south of the border. In an attack from Lima the Chinese could initially support an attack by one light infantry division in the Luhit River Valley as far west as Tepang. Subsequent to the development of a road to Tepang, which would require an

estimated 8 to 10 weeks, the Chinese could support up to 3 light infantry divisions in this area and advance to Balemaghani, approximately 10 miles west of Tepang with 1 of these divisions.

32. It is estimated that the Chinese would be unable by direct delivery from the Lhasa area or by redistribution of surplus supplies from Ladakh and eastern Tibet to stockpile sufficient amounts of military stores to support simultaneous advances to Siliguri-Hasimara, and Gauhati and Tezpur. An attack through Sikkim and Bhutan to Siliguri and Hasimara, included in the maximum force level of 175,000 troops, we believe is unlikely. The establishment of a strong salient in the Gauhati area, included in the force level of 123,000, would achieve virtually the same objective and would be easier to seize, less exposed to counterattack, and easier to sustain.

TABLE I

ESTIMATED PERSONNEL AND MATERIEL OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT) AND THE INDEPENDENT INFANTRY REGIMENT AS FOUND IN TIBET[a/]

ITEM	HQ AND STAFF	CHEM CO	SIG BN	RCN CO	ENGR BN	AT BN	AAAW BN	BAND	ORD PLT	ARTY REGT	INF REGT	TOTAL DIVISION (LIGHT)	IND INF RGT
Officers	210	9	41	10	39	54	57	1	3	207	352	1,685	352
Enlisted	710	134	283	129	443	364	376	37	37	1,290	3,791	15,176	3,791
Gun, 76.2-mm, Mtn	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	24	--	24	6
Gun, AT 57/76-mm	--	--	--	--	--	12	--	--	--	--	9	39	9
Mortar, 160-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12	--	12	4
Mortar, 120-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	9	27	9
Mortar, 82-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	27	81	27
Rcl Rfl, 57-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	9	27	9
Rcl Rfl, 75-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	9	27	9
RL, 90-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	18	54	18
AAMG, 12.7-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	24	--	--	--	9	51	9
HMG, 7.62-mm	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	45	135	45
LMG, 7.62-mm	--	--	--	9	18	--	--	--	--	--	117	378	117
SMG, 7.62-mm	112	18	18	112	42	--	77	--	4	203	919	3,343	919
Carbine, 7.62-mm	225	116	213	--	364	--	297	--	33	1,075	2,038	8,437	2,038
Pistol, 7.62-mm	169	7	36	7	31	--	45	2	1	146	414	1,686	414
Flamethrower	--	Unk	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	Unk	--
Trk, Cargo, 6x6	--	--	--	--	12	--	--	--	--	24	7	57	7
Trk, Cargo, 4x2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12	1	15	1
Trk, 1/4-ton, 4x4	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	5	1
Motorcycle	2	5	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	--	15	--
Bicycle	--	--	15	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	15	--
Cart	--	--	--	--	--	--	Unk	--	--	Unk	Unk	Unk	--
Horse, Mule, or Camel	135+	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	189+	775+	Unk

a/ Strengths above are at 100% TO&E. Units in Tibet are estimated to be at 85% TO strength.

TABLE II

DAILY RESUPPLY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CHINESE COMMUNIST INFANTRY DIVISION (STANDARD), THE INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT) AND THE INDEPENDENT INFANTRY REGIMENT[a]

INFANTRY DIVISION (STANDARD) (AT 85% TO&E)

	MAXIMUM (average combat)	MINIMUM (static, no action)
Class I (Rations)	24.6	24.6
Class II & IV (General Supplies)	22.3	2.0
Class III (POL)	28.0	7.0
Class V (Ammunition)	54.0	2.0
TOTALS	128.9	35.6

INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT) (AT 85% TO&E)

	MAXIMUM (continuous light combat)	MINIMUM (patrol actions only)
Class I (Rations)	23.6	23.6
Class II & IV (General Supplies)	21.5	2.0
Class III (POL)	3.1	nil (pack animals and porters only)
Class V (Ammunition)	28.0	2.0
TOTALS	76.2	27.6

[a] The supply requirements are based on the most likely employment of units. The standard division, we estimate, would be used only when terrain permitted the employment of armor and medium artillery. The supply requirements for the light division and independent infantry regiment are based on consumption rates for mountain fighting.

(Table continued next page)

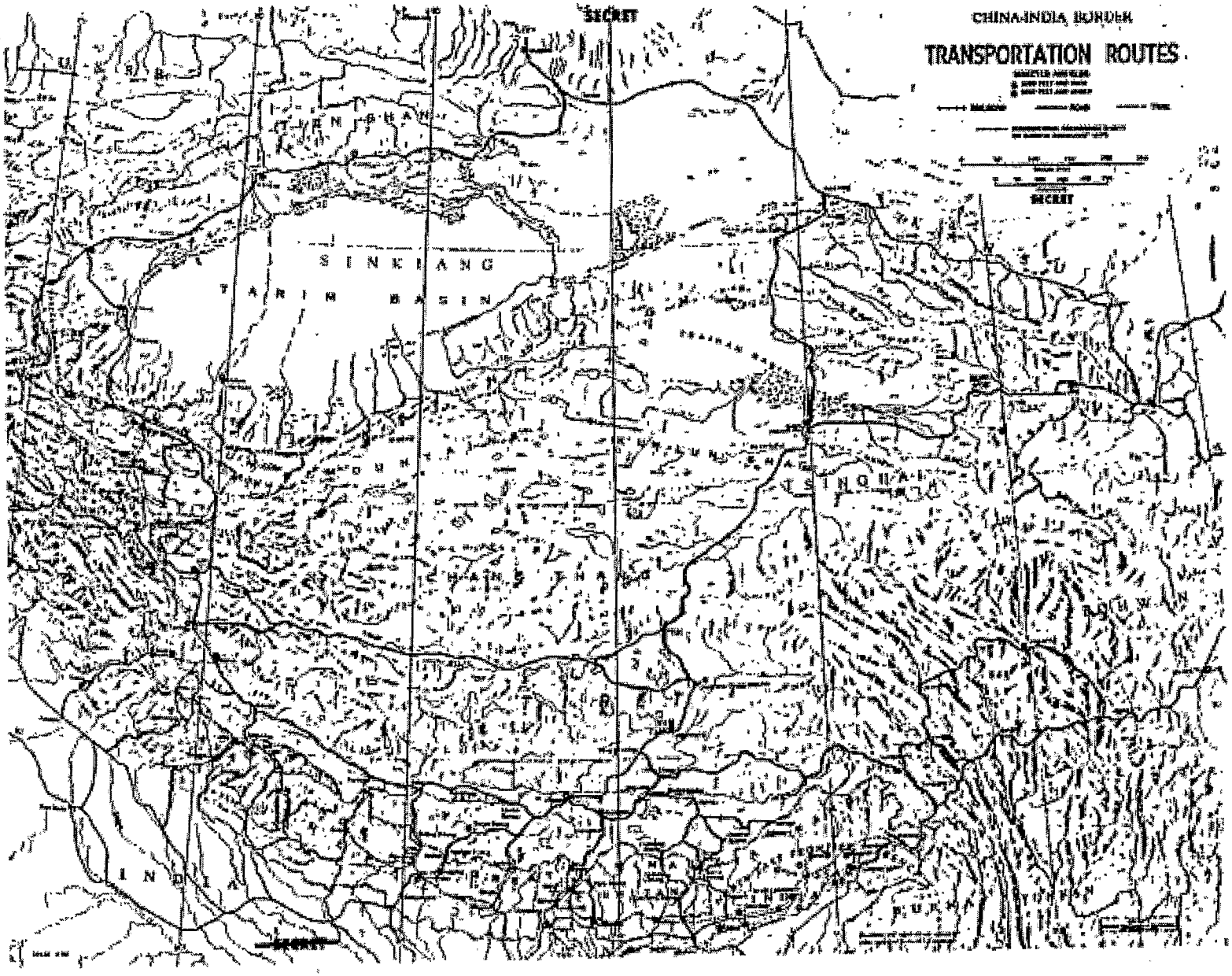
Table II (continued)

INDEPENDENT INFANTRY REGIMENT (AT 85% TO&E)

	MAXIMUM (continuous light combat)	MINIMUM (patrol actions only)
Class I (Rations)	7.6	7.6
Class II & IV (General Supplies)	7.0	.6
Class III (POL)	1.0	nil (pack animals and porters only)
Class V (Ammunition)	7.0	.6
TOTALS	22.6	8.8

NOTE: All figures are expressed in short tons.

(MAP ~~TO FOLLOW~~ attached)


SECRET
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